

## Second Language Learners and the Peer Review Activity

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## 要 約

### 第2言語学習者と学習者同士の評価活動

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第2言語教育は、いわゆるコミュニカティブアプローチと呼ばれる考え方をとり入れることになったことから、教授法においてもこのコミュニカティブアプローチという考えに適合する多くの方法ができていく。ライティングの分野においては、コミュニカティブな言語教育に一致した授業活動として学習者同士による評価がある。事例証拠や多くの研究により、第2言語教育における授業中の学習者同士の評価活動の効用は支持されている。

この論文は、二つの関連する研究に基づき、学習者が、学習者同士の評価をどのように感じているか、また、どのような点を好むかということ、調査したものである。まず最初に、学習者同士の評価活動中に教師が与える指導について学習者がどうとらえるかということ、フィードバックとしてどのような情報を求めているかということ、アンケートにより量的に調査した。第2の研究では、学習者同士の評価の総合的な有効性に関して、学習者がどう感じ、どのような点を好んでいるかを、面接により質的に調査をした。これらの考察が、学習者同士の評価が有効であるか否かに関して現在行われている研究の補足となり、第2言語教育に携わる教師が学習者同士の評価を授業で用いる際に、生徒が必要としていることをよりよく認識する手助けとなり、その結果、生徒同士が意義深い評価活動をうまく行えるようになればと願っている。

## INTRODUCTION

For many years, the teaching of first language(L1)writing operated under what is known as a product approach. As the name implies, the emphasis under this paradigm was on the finished product. There was a focus on usage, style, and expository writing. Hairston (1982) stated that under this product paradigm, writing instruction took place under the assumption that good writers already know what they want to say before they write, and their main task is "finding a form into which to organize their content" (p. 78). Hairston also explained that proponents of the product paradigm believed writing is a linear process and that writing instruction consists of teaching editing.

However, the approach to L1 writing instruction has gradually shifted from this product-oriented paradigm to a process-oriented paradigm. Hairston credited events such as the 1957 publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*, the essays of Francis Christensen in the 1960s, and the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English in 1966 as providing impetus for this change. In this seminar, Hairston explains, the final report encouraged a de-emphasis "of the formal teaching of grammar and usage" and emphasized having students "engage directly in the writing process..." (P. 81).

Hairston also explained the characteristics of the process paradigm. She described it as being research based, with a concern for audience and purpose. It teaches invention strategies and encourages the use and analysis of the revision process. It views revision as key and encourages the composing process to be examined throughout. Susser (1994) also described some characteristics of the process approach to writing instruction. He claimed that awareness and intervention are the two main facets of process pedagogy. In his description he states that a process approach makes students "aware that there are different processes for different kinds of writing" (p. 34), and that writing is an undertaking of constant discovery and not just a simple putting down of pre-thought out ideas on paper. He describes the intervention component of the process approach as including the concept that writing should not take place in isolation or as a solitary undertaking. The teacher, peers, and other sources of feedback could and should be included as part of the composing process.

This shift from a product approach to a process approach has also occurred in second language(L2) writing instruction. Susser states that the process approach started appearing in ESL /EFL literature in the late 1970s. He states the source for process writing's introduction to the field of L2 writing is often credited to Zamel (1976) as exemplified in her statement that writing instruction needs to focus on "the expressive and creative process of writing" (p. 74). Susser explains that this shift did not occur without controversy, but ascribes the opposition to this shift to uninformedness. For instance, many of the protests aimed at process writing claim that it ignores the product; however, as Zamel (1982) explains, process is by its very nature concerned with final product. Proponents of teaching writing through a process-oriented approach still recognize that the finished product is of course important, but in addition to being concerned with product, it also seeks to understand and improve learners' writing processes in order to help them improve their product. For second language writing instructors it is particularly

important to attend to the process of writing, since their learners may come into class with different ideas of how to compose. Addressing their processes may be the best way to improve their product.

## **PEER REVIEWS**

There are many instructional activities associated with process writing instruction. For instance, the process approach advocates making learners aware of invention strategies and using writing conferences during the composing process. Another common practice used under the banner of process teaching is the use of peer review sessions. Peer reviews generally refer to activities in which students exchange drafts of essays with their classmates, read them, and then comment and give suggestions through written and/or oral feedback using teacher-generated guidelines to aid them. Most researchers and instructors have claimed that peer reviews can have a number of benefits.

For instance, Hafernik (1984) claims that peer reviews can be beneficial in many areas. First of all, he states that many ESL writers focus on their instructor as the audience, and they limit the purpose of their writing to simply getting a good grade. By using peer reviews, he claims that writers will develop a better sense of audience and will learn to write with a communicative purpose in mind. Hafernik also claims that peer reviews can not only help students gain self-confidence and develop their own writing style, but also that the atmosphere of a class that uses peer reviews will be more cooperative. Lastly, he claims that peer reviews can be used as diagnostic and teaching tools by giving a teacher a glimpse of the different processes their learners use when writing.

Mittan (1989) cites benefits of peer reviews as well. One positive aspect of peer reviews that he notes is the fact that peer reviews can harness all four skills in negotiating meaning, thereby allowing learners to develop their communicative abilities. In addition, he states that peer reviews allow learners to receive more feedback from different perspectives. On a personal note, Mittan claims that peer reviews have made him "more aware of students' needs in all the modes of language-reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking. By observing students' peer discussions and reading their responses on review sheets, [he] can sometimes trace the source of writing difficulties to one of these areas" (p. 211). The opportunities that students are given to use expressive writing when they offer suggestions to their partners is another area where peer reviews are beneficial, according to Mittan.

In addition to some of the reasons mentioned above for using peer reviews, Chaudron (1983) also enumerates some possible benefits associated with this activity. He claims that peer reviews may be able to save teachers some time from personally responding to every draft and allow the teacher to focus on instruction. Chaudron notes that peer feedback is closer to the level of the learners and may be more relevant than feedback from the teacher. Learners can also gain a fuller understanding about the writing process and the importance of revision by responding to their peers' essays, according to Chaudron.

Other researchers, such as Hvitfeldt (1986) point out that peer reviews can lead learners to become more critical readers, especially in the areas of content and organization. This improvement will probably be gradual, but it can lead learners to better identify problems with

substance, organization, expression, and reasoning. As learners increase their critical powers in regard to their peers' essays, it is hoped that they will transfer this ability to their own writing.

The claims of peer review's benefits all seem intuitively appealing and have become generally accepted as legitimate in L2 composition instruction, with most studies supporting this view. For example, Chaudron (1983) and Jacobs and Zhang (1989) conducted separate studies which indicated that peer feedback was as helpful as teacher feedback in regard to students improving their papers. Also, Johnson and Mendonca (1994) and Villamil and De Guerrero (1996) conducted separate studies which indicated that students engage in numerous communicative activities during the peer review activity.

Although most studies seem to confirm the claimed benefits of peer reviews, some studies have come up with conflicting results. For example, Connor and Asenavage (1994) conducted a study which showed that students rarely used their peers' suggestions, while Zhang (1995) conducted a study which questioned the supposed affective advantage of peer reviews.

Zhang's findings indicated that learners overwhelmingly preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback. Zhang presents these findings as evidence that not only should we avoid assuming that peer reviews will work in L2 classes simply because they work in L1 classes, but that any other assumptions that instructors may have which treat L1 instruction the same as L2 instruction should be examined as well.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the fact that some studies concerning peer reviews yield supportive results and others do not is that while peer reviews often are helpful in the L2 classroom, there are many factors which can influence their effectiveness. Simply using a peer review is not a guarantee for success. Factors such as group dynamics, culture, differences in expectations, preparation, the types of negotiations that occur in peer review sessions, and learners' perceptions of peer reviews are all important aspects of which the teacher must be aware.

## **RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY**

Given the number of factors which can influence the effectiveness of peer reviews, it is important that research be conducted in these aforementioned areas so that instructors can fit the peer review activity to their learners' needs. This paper seeks to illuminate learner perceptions and preferences concerning peer reviews. Specifically, this paper investigates the following questions through two related studies. The first study addresses the following questions :

1. What types of questions on teacher-generated guidelines do learners find most helpful ?
2. What are learners' preferences on feedback with regard to teachers, peers, and lab tutors ?

The second study addresses these questions :

3. What do learners say affects the helpfulness of peer reviews ?
4. What are learners' perceptions of the helpfulness of peer reviews ?

Two studies were carried out with the aim of revealing general trends on the one hand, and examining some specific perceptions on the other. The first study employed a questionnaire which asked learners to rank the helpfulness of certain teacher-generated guideline items in an attempt to discover in what areas of their writing did learners find peer reviews to be

most helpful. In addition, this questionnaire sought to discover what sources of feedback were preferred by these learners. The second study attempted to take a closer, more qualitative look at some of these learners' perceptions by interviewing some of the subjects and analyzing their texts.

## **STUDY #1**

### **Subjects**

The subjects for this study were 51 learners, 30 males and 21 females, who were enrolled in an intermediate/advanced ESL writing course. The learners all were non-native speakers of English from a broad range of backgrounds including Asians, Europeans, Mexicans, and South and Central Americans. Nearly all of the learners were freshmen between the ages of 18 and 21 and had been in America for as short as two months and as long as six years. The learners all had a minimum score of 550 on the TOEFL. Although the learners were enrolled with four different teachers, they all participated in similar peer review formats, which consisted of learners exchanging and reading each others' drafts and then giving feedback in writing to their peers using teacher-generated guidelines. Peers discussed written feedback orally, as well. The learners participated in this study after taking part in two separate peer review sessions earlier in the semester for a compare and contrast essay and a critical analysis essay. Participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous.

### **Procedures**

The first part of this study consisted of a questionnaire which sought to investigate learners' perceptions of teacher-generated guideline items and their preferences for feedback sources. The questionnaire (see appendix) for this study consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of thirty questions on a seven-point Likert scale in which learners were to indicate the level of helpfulness they felt a given type of teacher-generated guideline for a peer review session represented. To devise this questionnaire, the researcher compiled possible items which could be used on typical teacher-generated guidelines for a peer review. After compiling this list, three other writing instructors were consulted to select the appropriate items, which resulted in six questions in each of the following five areas: mechanics, expression, grammar, content, and organization. Selection for appropriateness was based on relevance of the item to the targeted study population, actual use of such an item on a former peer review, and the appropriateness of the item to its relative category (grammar, mechanics, etc.). For example, an item addressing whether a learner had used examples to support assertions was selected as appropriate because the instructors agreed that it was relevant and authentic for the learners' needs and/or the instructors had used a similar item on peer reviews previously, and the instructors agreed that it was appropriate for the "content" category. The selected items were interspersed in a random order in the questionnaire.

The purpose of the second part of this questionnaire was to identify learners' preferences for the types of feedback that they personally found to be most helpful. In this part of the questionnaire, the learners were asked to respond to the degree of helpfulness they found different types of feedback and combinations (teacher, peer, tutor) thereof to be. This also was done using a seven-point Likert scale. The subjects were given this questionnaire at the begin-

ning of a class period, and those who volunteered to participate completed the questionnaire with the researcher present to answer any questions which arose.

## **Instrumentation**

### Validity

Internal construct validity, as described by Henning (1987), can be estimated by examining item correlations and subtest correlations. If an item correlates higher with a different subtest than its own, it should be rejected for that subtest. Correlations between items and total or subtest scores are often inflated because of the presence of the variable in the total score itself. Therefore, it is desirable to remove this inflating effect for validity reasons. Once this inflating effect is removed, the internal construct validity proportion can be reflected as a coefficient equal to the proportion of valid items to total items. After correction for part-whole overlap was conducted for this questionnaire, it was discovered that four items were not valid; one was in the area of mechanics, two were in the area of expression, and one was in the area of organization. Of these four items, one item, which addressed transition use, was found to correlate most highly with the "organization" category. Given that a case could reasonably be made for including this item in "organization", it was reassigned to that category. For the remaining three items, a similar rationale for reassignment could not be made, and they were subsequently eliminated from the questionnaire analysis.

Table 1 displays the ratio of valid items for each subtest and their respective validity coefficients both before and after the reassignment and exclusions of the suspect items. As can be seen, after the adjustments were made the validities for all the subtests are in the desirable range.

Table 1

	items/valid before adjustment	validity coefficient before adjustment	items/valid after adjustment	validity coefficient after adjustment
content	6 of 6	1	6 of 6	1
organization	5 of 6	0.83	6 of 6	1
expression	4 of 6	0.67	4 of 4	1
grammar	6 of 6	1	6 of 6	1
mechanics	5 of 6	0.83	5 of 5	1

### Reliability

Reliabilities were obtained by using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20. The reliabilities for the subtests are displayed in Table 2. As can be seen, all reliabilities are within the acceptable range.

Table 2

	reliability before adjustment	reliability after adjustment
content	0.86	0.86
organization	0.82	0.83
expression	0.74	0.72
grammar	0.84	0.84
mechanics	0.84	0.83

### Questionnaire Results

The analyzed questionnaire results consisted of five subtests. The subtests of grammar, organization, and content each had six items. The mechanics subtest had five items, and the expression subtest had four items. The average item mean and overall subtest mean are displayed in Table 3 along with significance levels which were determined by conducting t-Tests with a confidence interval of 95%. As can be seen in this table, content was rated as most helpful, followed by organization, expression, grammar, and mechanics, respectively. In addition, Table 3 also illustrates the fact that the means for each subtest are significantly different than the others.

Table 3

subtests	mean	item mean	significant difference ( $p < .05$ )
content	83.57	5.85	>2-5
organization	76.89	5.38	< 1 >3-5
expression	71.64	5.01	<1,2>4,5
grammar	62.56	4.38	<1-3>5
mechanics	47.73	3.34	<1-4

Table 4 displays the means of learners' rankings of the helpfulness of different types of feedback using a seven-point Likert scale. It also displays the significance between the different items' means.

Table 4

feedback source	item mean	significant ranked difference $p < .05$
teacher/tutor peer	6.41	>2-7
teacher/peer	6.02	< 1 >4-7
teacher/tutor	5.67	< 1 >5-7
teacher	5.55	<1,2>5-7
tutor/peer	4.69	<1-4
tutor	4.53	<1-4
peer	4.45	<1-4



The results shown above seem to indicate that items addressing content and organization are found to be most helpful by learners, and that mechanics and grammar are not as helpful. These findings are consistent with a study done by Mangelsdorf (1992).

While content and organization were found to be more helpful than grammar and mechanics, item analysis can indicate areas where mechanics and grammar items are most helpful, even though those overall areas ranked so low. For instance, the items about punctuation, and especially capitalization and format, do not seem to be very helpful to learners. The item that addressed reference citing ranked the highest. Perhaps this type of item would be appropriate to include in a peer review.

There also might be other issues involved with the low ranking of the area of grammar. A Jacobs and Zhang (1989) study indicated that learners' peers seemed to do quite well when dealing with grammar problems. Therefore, one might conclude that this area would be ranked higher in regard to helpfulness. However, one explanation for its low ranking may be an issue of trust. It is possible that learners see their peers as unqualified to give suggestions in the area of grammar.

As can be seen in Table 4, learners unquestionably prefer teacher feedback to other types of feedback, but it also illustrates that learners significantly prefer as much feedback from different sources as possible. Also, these findings show that these learners find any feedback from the teacher to be significantly more helpful than any feedback which does not include the instructor. Furthermore, while the difference between the ranking of helpfulness of feedback from teacher/tutor and teacher only is not significant, the difference between teacher/peer feedback and teacher-only feedback is significant, further supporting that learners do find peer reviews to be useful.

## **STUDY #2**

### **Subjects**

The subjects for this study were four volunteers from the 51 learners who responded to the questionnaire. Two were female and two were male. The learners' native countries were Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Poland.

### **Procedures**

This study sought to further investigate what learners' perceptions were about teacher-generated guidelines and other perceptions the learners had concerning peer reviews in general.

Two sources of data were utilized. The collected written data consisted of the four learners' drafts of essays before a peer review session and drafts of the same essay after the peer review session. These essays were to be critical analyses of an assigned reading. As part of a writing class, the learners were given five readings, from which they were to choose one to critically analyze. Their critical analyses consisted of determining whether the author of their particular reading had adequately supported his or her thesis with appropriate support, such as relevant examples, logic, etc. These drafts were analyzed in order to identify patterns in the learners' revisions which were the result of feedback given in the peer review session. Also collected were the teacher-generated questions used to guide the learners in the peer review process.

Revisions made as a result of feedback given in the peer review were verified in individual interviews with the researcher.

The interviews were done individually in a language lab. They were audio-taped and ranged from twenty to thirty minutes. The learners were asked questions in the following areas:

1. Do you find the peer review process to be helpful?
2. What affects your decision to use or ignore the suggestions made by your peers?
3. What influences the usefulness of peer reviews?

In addition to the questions above, the learners were asked about specific instances of suggestions they had received from their peers in an actual peer review session and why they chose whether or not to incorporate them in their revised papers.

### **Analysis of learners' texts**

The learners' drafts before and after the peer reviews were analyzed to identify where learners gave suggestions and whether or not these suggestions were incorporated. In addition, using the constant comparative method (Strauss, 1987), the analysis sought to classify patterns or types of revisions made/not made. First, the written suggestions made by the peers on the learners' drafts were labeled with a green marker. Then, the final draft was labeled with a red marker if the suggestion was not incorporated and a green marker if it was. These revisions were then examined for common categories of suggestions and instances of non-incorporation/incorporation patterns by the researcher and four other raters.

### **Text analysis results**

The analysis of the drafts and final essays revealed 76 peer suggestions, of which 54 were incorporated by the writers of the essays. The suggestions consisted of the following types : grammar, expression, organization, content, and mechanics. Table 5 displays a breakdown of the types and number of suggestions, as well as the number of instances of incorporation and non-incorporation.

Table 5

SUBTESTS	# of suggestions	# of incorporation	# not used
EXPRESSION	19	7	12
re-wording	19	7	12
CONTENT	16	14	2
explain an idea/term	11	9	2
suggest an idea	5	5	0
ORGANIZATION	7	5	2
transition word	1	1	0
org. of a sentence	2	2	0
org. of a paragraph	1	1	0
combine paragraphs	1	0	1
separate paragraphs	1	0	1
conclude	1	1	0
GRAMMAR	18	15	3
verb tense	9	8	1
plural	3	3	0
s/v agreement	3	1	2
prepositions	3	3	0
MECHANICS	16	13	3
commas	5	4	1
citing	2	1	1
spelling	4	4	0
capitalization	4	3	1
spostrophe	1	1	0
TOTAL	76	54	22

### Expression

Reviewers' suggestions which were categorized as expression suggestions consisted of instances where the reviewer offered an alternative way to convey the same thought. In instances where it was not clear whether the learner thought the original was ungrammatical or whether they were simply trying to offer a better way of expressing the same idea, the reviewer was consulted. A typical example of this is illustrated by a sentence in which the original read:

"It seems clear that Hirsch is correct in stating that skills without knowledge are actionless."

The peer reviewer wrote "word choice" next to "actionless" and suggested the word "empty".

## **Content**

Suggestions that fell under the heading of “content” were made up of instances where the reviewer called for further explanation of a concept or term, or when the reviewer suggested an idea or pointed out how an idea could be better supported. The following example is a common type of content suggestion. The writer had stated:

“In my opinion, the debate between the use of ‘core knowledge’ and ‘skill-oriented knowledge’ was.....”

and the peer reviewer asked for a clarification of the terms, writing in the margin:

“kind of confusing. What system is this?”

## **Organization**

Organization suggestions were characterized by suggestions which were concerned with the structure of the paper and how ideas were arranged and related to each other through the use of transitions. Organization concerns such as these could be at the sentence, paragraph, or overall essay level. An instance of an organization suggestion is typified by the following example where the writer had been discussing the strengths of an article, then abruptly switched to a discussion about the weaknesses:

“The reader may find some weaknesses...”

The peer reviewer asked for a transition, and gave the phrase “on the other hand” as a suggestion.

## **Grammar**

Suggestions which fell under the grammar heading were all instances where the suggestions the peers made involved verb tense, subject/verb agreement, prepositions, and plurals. In cases where it was not clear if the learner was merely suggesting an alternative way of expressing something (which is a separate category of suggestion type), or evaluating the passage in question as ungrammatical, the reviewers were consulted. A typical grammar error would be the following instance, where a learner had problems with subject/verb agreement:

“[He] also emphasizes the pressure a college student encounter.”

The peer corrected this by changing the last word to “encounters”.

## **Mechanics**

For a suggestion to fall under the category of mechanics, it had to be a suggestion concerning punctuation, spelling, or capitalization. A typical example would be in the following instance where the learner’s original sentence was the following:

“I’m having trouble of getting financial aid, and grants.”

and the peer reviewer crossed out the comma.

Contrary to the findings of Connor and Asenavage (1994), the fact that these learners incorporated 54 of 76 suggestions supports the claim that learners do use their peers’ suggestions, as indicated in studies such as Mendonca and Johnson’s (1994) and Nelson and Murphy’s (1993). Moreover, the high number of content-suggestion incorporation is consistent with Mangelsdorf’s (1992) findings that learners find peer reviews helpful in the area of content.

In almost every area, learners usually incorporated their peers’ suggestions. The most commonly rejected items were in the area of expression, possibly indicating that learners did not want to lose authorial control in their style of expressing themselves. The fact that some

suggestions were incorporated and some were ignored can also be viewed as consistent with Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) findings which indicated that learners reflect upon suggestions before deciding whether to incorporate them or not.

### **Analysis of interviews**

After the interviews were conducted, the audiotapes were analyzed following the constant comparative method (Strauss, 1987) of coding data. Themes were identified which reflected the subjects' perceptions of the overall helpfulness of peer reviews, concerns about their peers' and their own ability to give helpful feedback, their perceptions of which areas of their writing are most helped by peer reviews, and their perceptions of what kinds of suggestions are helpful. These coded themes then were grouped into categories that were grounded in the data.

### **Helpfulness**

The first major category that emerged was in the area of learners' overall perceptions of peer review's helpfulness. While all the learners noted that peer reviews were helpful in at least some areas, only three out of the four subjects felt that peer reviews overall were helpful.

They mentioned that peer reviews helped them see their mistakes and gave them feedback at a level to which they could relate and understand. These comments were typified by quotes such as the following:

"I don't see the mistake I'm making, but when other people read it they can correct it." (S 1)

"I like them. They've been helpful for my essays." (S 2)

"It helps my paper to improve. Peers are writing the same thing, and the teacher is old, they are the same age, they have similar ideas-this is helpful". (S 4)

The subjects also expressed positive feelings about giving suggestions to their peers. Positive comments centered on comparing their peers' drafts with their own as being useful. The following comments are typical of the learners' positive statements regarding reading their peers' drafts and giving suggestions:

"[Reading peers' essays is helpful] because when I look at other people's paper, I can refer back to my paper and I can use the same question by questioning my own paper and see if what is there is supposed to be there." (S 1)

"I learn a lot. I can see different styles and we all can learn English from each other more and more." (S 2)

### **Concerns**

Despite the many positive comments the learners had regarding peer reviews, they also expressed some concerns. These concerns included a lack of trust in their peers, a feeling of being unqualified to give helpful suggestions, and the fear that they would hurt their partners' feelings by giving them suggestions. These concerns were expressed in utterances such as the following subject's statement that a peer review is helpful:

"If it's with the teacher, if she does the peer review. As a student, we are all learning how to write and some student might just give me a suggestion that the teacher might not like. It happened to me on one of my papers." (S 3)

Other comments included the following:

"I don't like it. I don't think I'm good at it. I don't have enough knowledge." (S 3)

"I don't think I'm helpful for them, and I am trying to find their good points. I shouldn't find their bad points. It discourages them." (S 4)

### **Perceived areas of helpfulness**

Another major theme that emerged from the interviews was the area of their writing which the learners felt were most helped by peer reviews. The learners expressed a broad range of areas in which they perceived peer reviews as being helpful. Most commonly mentioned were statements that included content, organization, and grammar.

"We seemed to focus on organization. I know pretty much how to organize my paper, but other people can give me their opinion, what I need to add, what I should focus more on. They can correct my grammar and what I need in the paper and what I don't need. I need grammar help." (S 1)

### **Perceptions of what makes suggestions helpful**

Another category which emerged from the data was what affects the subjects' decisions to incorporate or ignore suggestions offered by their peers. Learners reported that they found specific suggestions to be most helpful. These statements included:

"If the suggestion tells me what to do and it's specific about what I should do, I like it." (S 1)

[suggestions are good if they are] "specific, then you really know, when you get that peer review, you know where to correct and what to correct and what is wrong and if someone is just in general, I don't know if it's so helpful for you to correct anything in your paper." (S 2)

Learners had difficulty articulating other reasons regarding their decisions for incorporating their peers' feedback in their writing. Their statements indicated that perhaps they often relied on intuition. For example, most comments were similar to the following statement that one subject expressed, saying that the decision to incorporate suggestions was based:

"on how I feel, I just go on how I feel." (S 1)

The learners found it much easier to explain why they wouldn't incorporate a peers' suggestion. Most common were responses that they didn't like it if a peer tried to change their idea. These sentiments were expressed in statements such as:

"Sometimes I think like what they tell me to change will change the meaning of my paper, that's when I probably reject the suggestion." (S 1)

"If someone's trying to change my idea, that's what I don't like. A good critique is about helping you say what you want in a better way." (S 2)

### **Perceptions of positive peer comments**

Sometimes learners receive no corrective suggestion in regard to a teacher-generated guideline. Experts such as Mitten (1989) claim that teachers should always begin a peer review session with a positive question, such as "what do you like best about your partner's paper?", or a peer may respond to other teacher-generated items simply by saying "It's great." These learners expressed both positive and negative perceptions about the usefulness of such comments from their peers. Positive comments included remarks such as:

"It's more helpful when I get a suggestion, but yeah, it's helpful because what she likes the most is also what I like the most, so I know I shouldn't change it. Usu-

ally that's how it is." (S 1)

When the subjects explained that positive comments were of little help, they generally mentioned that positive comments don't help them improve their paper. These perceptions are illustrated in the following comments:

"No, it doesn't make me change anything." (S 3)

"No, I just don't like it. It's like when I show somebody some pictures and they say 'That's beautiful'. What can you get from that? You don't get anything. If they like my paper, I want to know why. Is it because of this, or that?" (S 2)

### **Perceptions of the peer reviewers**

When the learners discussed their concerns about whom their peer reviewers were, they generally mentioned that they wanted partners whom they perceived to be "good" writers, whom they characterized as someone with good grammar, or someone who gets good marks. They also expressed that they wanted partners who took the process seriously, and they felt that it was possible to have a partner who was poor in one area of writing, but could still give good suggestions in another area. The following comments were among the most common in regard to peer review partners:

"I guess that it has a lot to do with who is doing the peer review, like my other peer reviewer, there were no suggestions. I don't know if there were no suggestions, or if it's just that he wasn't paying attention and look for mistakes. I don't care if they're a better writer than me. I basically just look at what they wrote down and it will help my paper. I would like them to write stuff down. That's the point of peer reviews." (S 1)

### **Results of interview regarding text analysis**

To conclude the interviews discussed above, each learner was asked about the specific instances of incorporation and non-incorporation of their peers' suggestions. This was done in order to determine if any patterns could be identified which could further illuminate what types of suggestions learners found to be helpful, thereby allowing instructors to write more appropriate teacher-generated guidelines and to better prepare their learners by instructing them as to what kinds of suggestions to make.

### **Expression**

The largest category of revision for these learners consisted of suggestions that restated a word or idea with different words or phrases. As can be seen in Table 5, most of the time these comments were ignored. The learners' reasons for this are typified by the following statements:

"I liked my original. It's stronger and more specific. It's just a feeling." (S 2)

"It's the same, so what is the point in changing it?" (S 2)

When asked about why they had taken suggestions under this category and used them in their essays, the learners mostly commented that they thought it sounded better, indicating that they were possibly relying on intuition in these cases.

### **Content**

In the area of content, the learners seemed to decide how to incorporate the suggestions by either comparing it and seeing if it agreed with what they thought about their essay before

the peer review, or if it was something that they thought made their paper clearer or stronger. For example, S 1 explained how she decided to include her partner's suggestion about what to include in her conclusion:

"For conclusion, I didn't like my conclusion, but I knew I need something, but I didn't know what to write anymore, so when she said I should add a lesson on how I feel, I realized that I should add a lesson."

S 2 explained that she included an explanation of a proverb because:

"I took it for granted that people would understand. When she pointed this out, I knew she was right. This was helpful."

### **Grammar**

Of the 18 grammar suggestions made, only 1 was an instance of a learner erroneously changing a correct grammatical form to an incorrect form. In this lone instance, the learner had used the word "data" and her peer reviewer had suggested an incorrect plural form of "datas". When asked why she chose not to use this suggestion, she replied:

"I have never heard 'datas', only 'data', so I didn't change it."

When the learners were asked why they had incorporated certain grammatical suggestions, they often stated that they hadn't noticed their mistake, or they hadn't known they were wrong. For example, S 3 had some problems with verb tense consistency. This was pointed out and the suggestions were consequently incorporated. When asked why the suggestions were used, the learner stated:

"I didn't see that before, so that was helpful." (S 3)

### **Mechanics**

The most common explanation for why mechanics corrections were made are typified by the following statement concerning a spelling error:

"I think I would have seen that mistake anyway, so when my partner sees it, I know I need to correct." (S 4)

The learners seemed to feel that they would probably catch these errors themselves eventually, without their peers help, but they still find their peers remarks to be useful.

In the instances of the learners not using the suggestion, it appears that the learners considered the suggestion and decided whether it was correct or not. For instance one learner was given a suggestion to change a citation, but the learner ignored it, noting that she was using MLA documentation, and the partner was using APA. The partner didn't know what was appropriate for her, so she considered this fact and correctly chose to disregard her partner's suggestion.

### **Organization**

For the suggestions and revisions under the heading of organization, the learners claimed that they didn't know their organization was confusing until it was pointed out by their peers. They didn't seem to be able to articulate how they decided to incorporate or ignore these suggestions. They mostly said that if it made sense to them, they used the suggestion, and if it didn't, they ignored it, once again indicating that perhaps they were relying on a sense of intuition more than anything else.

In summary, the text analyses and interviews revealed some common perceptions that



these learners had regarding peer reviews. First, these learners find peer reviews to be helpful. They perceive peer reviews to be most helpful in the area of content, but they also indicated other areas, such as organization and grammar, that can be helped in peer reviews. This study also revealed that learners prefer specific comments, regardless of the area in which the suggestion is made.

These learners discussed some common concerns they had with peer reviews as well. They don't want to relinquish authorial control of their writings, and they can be mistrustful of their peers' and their own ability to make useful suggestions. This is mirrored in their preference for teacher feedback, yet they still prefer peer and teacher feedback to teacher feedback alone.

### **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Many learners' perceptions concerning peer reviews have been examined in the two studies described in this paper. While these studies taken alone obviously do not justify generalizations that can be made with confidence, some of the findings in these related studies are consistent with previous studies done in this field and can offer possible pedagogical implications.

For example, both of these studies support that peer reviews are helpful and are, therefore, appropriate for classroom use. The questionnaire supports this in two ways; first, all of the items in this questionnaire, except for some in the mechanics category, had means of over 4.00 on a scale of 7.00. Also, although learners ranked peers' feedback lower than teachers' feedback, they still indicated that they wanted as much feedback as possible. The interviews further supported this claim, with the subjects giving specific reasons as to why peer reviews are helpful, such as helping them see their mistakes and giving them feedback at their level. Finally, the interviews and the analysis of the learners' texts revealed that learners did thoughtfully consider, and often use, suggestions offered by their peers. All of these points can be used as support of the proposition that peer reviews are a useful classroom writing technique.

These studies also have pedagogical implications for the treatment of content and organization in peer reviews. Both of these studies support the notion that peer reviews are appropriate for organization and especially content. The questionnaire clearly showed that these learners found content oriented teacher-generated guidelines to be the most helpful. The interviews and text analysis also supported this idea, although the actual suggestions and revisions given and taken on the drafts/essays in the area of organization were small in number. Viewed in conjunction with other researchers' findings, this could imply that teachers should consider focusing peer reviews on content and organization.

Another area where these studies have some pedagogical implications is in regard to specific feedback. Both of these studies reveal that learners find specific comments and feedback during peer reviews to be most helpful. Specific items were ranked higher in the questionnaire and every learner in the interview verbally expressed a preference for specific suggestions. This suggests that instructors should consider writing guidelines which encourage specific responses. For example, questions about organization could address specific areas, such as the purpose of the conclusion, rather than an overall impression of the draft's organization. In addition, teachers can encourage learners to go give specific feedback by modeling specific feed-

back themselves, or pointing out particularly helpful instances of specific feedback on the students' essays.

The issue of students trusting each other to give helpful feedback was another pedagogical concern which these studies raised. While these studies do support the idea that learners prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback, as was indicated in Zhang's (1995) study, they more importantly show that learners prefer as much feedback as possible when revising their papers. Despite this apparent preference for as much feedback as possible, there still appears to be issues of trust, or lack there, of which the instructor should be aware. It is interesting to note here that one of the interviewed students stated that although he claimed that peer reviews were sometimes helpful in improving his writing, he still wanted feedback only from the teacher. This statement underscores the possibility that some learners can perceive their peers or themselves as unqualified to offer helpful suggestions. Such learners may cling to the idea that the teacher is the only source worthy of giving feedback. It also raises the possibility that some learners may see their instructor as the sole audience for their writing.

To contend with possible problems of trust, perhaps instructors could respond to the peer review suggestions and even take an active approach in the peer review sessions until learners begin to see that they and their partners can give useful feedback to each other. Another implication of this concern that learners have about their partners is that instructors need to be careful in assigning peer partners or groups. For example, since learners expressed dissatisfaction with learners who were perceived as inferior writers, perhaps learners should be paired with others of similar proficiency levels, or even be allowed to pick their own partners.

Related to the issue of trust is the question of grammar correction's role in peer reviews. While learners ranked grammar the second lowest on the scale of helpfulness on the questionnaire, its overall subtest ranking was over 4.00, indicating that it was still perceived as an area that could be helped through peer reviews. In addition, it was mentioned several times in the interviews as something the learners wanted addressed. An interesting finding in the essay analysis was that even though there was no explicit item on the teacher-generated guidelines concerning grammar for these peer reviews, the learners still made 18 grammar suggestions, and the suggestions and revisions were almost always correct. This could be an indication that grammar suggestions are appropriate in peer reviews, as Jacobs and Zhang's (1989) study indicated. This also raises the point that learners often equate good writing with good grammar, and teachers will need to be prepared to address this issue with their students

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

These studies raise the possibility for the need for more research in a few areas. For example, research with more detailed investigation of actual peer sessions and how the learners' perceptions and preferences are shaped by the happenings in the peer review session could be useful. Such research could further reveal what contributes to a learner finding a peer review session to be helpful.

Research similar to that described in this paper but with a larger sample of subjects and research with learners at different proficiency levels could also contribute to a better understanding of learners' perceptions. What is perceived as useful by one relatively small group of learn-

ers or by one level of learners may not be perceived as useful by others.

Given the fact that learners placed an emphasis on their perceptions of their partner's proficiency as writers as being a major contribution to the effectiveness of their peer review sessions, research in this area could be useful. For instance, research which investigates learners' perceptions of the helpfulness of their peers' suggestions and the actual helpfulness of these suggestions as measured by independent raters, or research that examines the effectiveness of different groupings of learners according to proficiency levels could shed some light on this area.

Finally, these studies both raised questions about the place for grammar in peer reviews. Whether rightly or wrongly, learners are certainly very concerned with their grammar during writing. These studies showed that these learners addressed grammar even when it was not an explicit part of the teacher-generated guidelines and that they found peer suggestions regarding grammar to be useful. Further research could investigate if grammar does indeed benefit from peer reviews.

### **LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

This study is limited by its lack of generalizability. Although the population for the questionnaire was adequate, the interviewed learners were small in number. In addition, these learners were all basically at the same level. Also, this study did not investigate firsthand what happened in the individual peer review sessions. Only written suggestions from the peers were addressed, which is a limited view of the whole process. Finally, despite the fact that the teachers in this study all used similar peer review formats, it is unavoidable that they had different experiences because of their instructors' approaches to this activity. This could limit the applicability of this study to the use of peer reviews in general.

Even though this study has some limitations, it has revealed some of these learners' perceptions about the peer review process and how these perceptions shape their feelings towards the effectiveness of peer reviews. Among other things, this study supports the notion that learners do find peer reviews to be helpful experiences, that learners do thoughtfully incorporate their partners' suggestions, and that learners want feedback from as many sources as possible. More comprehensive research in these areas would be helpful to further investigate these claims.

## APPENDIX

### PEER REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Part I Directions :

Please fill in the following items. Remember, you can feel free to skip any or all of the following items.

Gender            M            F

Native language

Years you have lived in the United States

Home country

#### Part II Directions :

Considering the following list of items for peer reviews of essays, indicate which types of teacher-generated guideline questions you find helpful.

1. Questions that address verb/tense consistency.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful

2. Questions that address whether my introduction fulfills its purpose.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful

3. Questions that address whether I have addressed all sides of an issue fairly.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful

4. Questions about run-on sentences.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful

5. Questions about whether the thesis is located in the proper place.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful

6. Questions about capitalization.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
7. Questions that address whether the ideas expressed in my essay are appropriate for the topic.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
8. Questions that address whether I have used effective vocabulary.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
9. Questions that address the logical order of my paper's main points.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
10. Questions that address whether I have used transitions effectively.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
11. Questions that address punctuation.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
12. Questions about sentence fragments.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
13. Questions that address whether I have included enough material to be effective.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
14. Questions about the spacing for margins, indentation, and punctuation.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
15. Questions about prepositions.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |

16. Questions that address the purpose of my conclusion.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
17. Questions about whether my thesis is fully developed.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
18. Questions that ask for parts of my essay that are confusingly worded to be pointed out.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
19. Questions that ask whether my ideas relate to each other.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
20. Questions about format issues, such as font, paper length, and appearance.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
21. Questions that address whether my organization is consistent with an accepted model.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
22. Questions about article usage.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
23. Questions that ask for passages that are expressed particularly well.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
24. Questions that address the formality vs. informality of my language.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
25. Questions that ask whether references are cited properly.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |

26. Questions that ask if I use examples to support my points.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |
27. Questions about subject-verb agreement.
- |         |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7       |
| Not     |   |   |   |   |   | Very    |
| Helpful |   |   |   |   |   | Helpful |

### Part III:

Please rank the following types of feedback in the order of helpfulness.

- Feedback from a writing lab tutor only.
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful
- Peer feedback only.
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful
- Teacher feedback only.
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful
- Teacher and peer feedback.
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful
- Teacher and writing lab tutor feedback.
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful
- Peer and writing lab tutor feedback only.
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful
- Teacher, peer, and writing lab tutor feedback.
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not						Very
Helpful						Helpful

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